

CLAIMS

1. A method of distributing performance data concerning a plurality of subjects from a distribution site to a user site, the method comprising:

5        storing gathered performance data concerning each of the subjects in a central database, wherein the storing step comprises storing the gathered data to form a contiguous sequential block of historical data for each subject; and

10      on request from the user, providing a stream of historical data from the blocks in the central database such that a ticker tape of a plurality of graphical historical data charts can be displayed at the user's site, automatically and without user interaction.

2. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the stream of historical data is provided as a stream of graphical data.

15      3. A method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein a rate of generation of the graphical historical data charts corresponds to the speed of movement of the ticker tape displayed at the user's site.

20      4. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the storing step comprises storing the gathered performance data in the historical data blocks such that each block is partitioned according to predetermined different time periods.

25      5. A method according to Claim 4, wherein the historical data blocks are each partitioned in daily, weekly, monthly and yearly time periods.

6. A method according to any preceding claim, further comprising gathering performance data at a central site and subsequently updating the distribution site with the gathered data.

7. A method according to Claim 6, wherein the gathering step comprises downloading performance data from a plurality of electronic data vendors where two or more data vendors have different data distribution protocols, and for each data vendor having a different data distribution protocol, the method further comprises implementing an appropriate 5 communications protocol for downloading performance data from each data vendor.

8. A method according to Claim 6 or 7, wherein the gathering step comprises consolidating, integrating and reformatting gathered performance data from the plurality of data vendors.

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9. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the providing step is initiated by a data request from the user.

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10. A method according to Claim 9, wherein the request includes identity information identifying the user, and the method further comprises accessing a user configuration file describing a required data configuration for the identified user, or for a newly identified user, creating a new user configuration file set to a default configuration.

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11. A method according to Claim 10, wherein the communications network is the Internet and the identity information comprises a cookie file initially sent to the user.

12. A method according to Claim 10 or 11, further comprises storing the user configuration files and identity information in a relational customer database and accessing the same using Structured Query Language.

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13. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the providing step further comprises sending a user configuration file to its user together with a data handling function arranged to present to the user the historical data in accordance with the user configuration file.

14. A method according to Claim 13, wherein the communications network is the Internet and the data handling function comprises an applet.

5 15. A method according to Claim 13 or 14, wherein the data handling function configures a user's screen according to the information in the configuration data file and requests specific historical data from the central database for immediate display.

10 16. A method according to Claim 15, wherein the providing step comprises only supplying specifically requested historical data.

15 17. A method according to any of Claims 13 to 16, further comprising using the data handling function to arrange the historical data into charts and to display simultaneously a plurality of charts arranged as an endless stream of moving graphical images forming a ticker tape on a user's screen.

20 18. A method according to Claim 17, wherein the step of using the handling function comprises configuring the user's screen to control the amount and type of historical data to be displayed.

19. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the storing step is carried out on a daily basis.

25 20. A system for distributing performance data concerning a plurality of subjects from a distribution site to a user site, the system comprising:

a central database of performance data relating to each of the plurality of subjects, storing means for storing gathered performance data concerning each of the subjects in the central database, the storing means being arranged to store the data to form a contiguous sequential block of historical data for each subject; and

read out means arranged to provide, on request from the user, a stream of historical data from the blocks in the central database such that a ticker tape of a plurality of graphical historical data charts can be displayed at the user's site, automatically and without user interaction.

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21. A configurable ticker tape interface for providing performance data regarding a plurality of subjects stored in a remote database, the ticker tape interface being arranged to be configurable by the user to specify a subset of the plurality of subjects, to obtain current performance data and historical data from the remote database regarding the selected subset 10 of subjects, and to generate user-controlled movable icons of the ticker tape interface, each icon representing the current performance data and historical data for selected subject in a graphical format.

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22. A graphical user interface comprising:

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processing means for obtaining updated information from a distribution database regarding a plurality of subjects and processing the obtained information to display a moving set of graphical images, each image representing current performance data and historical data for a given subject; and

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selecting means for creating a user selection, the selecting means being arranged to configure the processing means to obtain information for a selection of the plurality of subjects stored in the distribution database.

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23. A graphical user interface according to Claim 22, further comprising selection means, operable by the user, for selecting a time period of historical data, smaller than that stored in the distribution database for a given subject, which is to be displayed in the set of graphical images.